

# **COMMERCIAL PROJECTS**

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## **A CITIZENS GUIDE TO WESTPORT'S PERMIT PROCESS**

The Town Officials of Westport have adopted requirements to protect the Westport citizens' health, safety and property values. These requirements must be met in the construction, renovation or change in use of a commercial building or property.

### **TO PLAN, IMPLEMENT AND COMPLETE PROJECTS THAT REQUIRE APPROVALS AND PERMITS FROM WESTPORT'S REGULATORY AGENCIES:**

#### **I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

- A. If you:
- are not familiar with all of Westport's requirements,
  - need guidance through the permit process, or
  - would like to discuss your project before you have complete plans,
1. Contact the Planning and Zoning Office at **(203) 341-1030** from 8:30 A.M. -4:30 P.M., Monday through Friday.
  2. Set up an appointment with a staff member to discuss your project.
  3. Please bring a survey or plot plan of your property (if available), to the meeting with the Planning and Zoning staff member.
- B. The Planning and Zoning staff member will discuss your project with you and advise you of the following:
- your zoning district
  - specific zoning requirements for your project
  - wetlands, or a water course that may be on your property
  - If you need Health Department approval
  - If you are located in a historic district
  - If you are located in the Coastal Area Management (CAM) zone
  - If your property is in a flood zone
  - Other specific information that will be required for your project.
- C. To obtain approvals from other departments, call for an appointment. The Town departments involved in issuing permits are also responsible for conducting inspections. Therefore, these staff members need to establish a specific time to review your project with you.

Depending on the nature of your project, you may be able to come in for a zoning permit. Larger projects that involve a "change of use" or exterior renovations to the building or the site will require a Site Plan Approval application, which involves a hearing before the Commission.

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**II. COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS**

*Plan on at least two months to have a commercial building reviewed by the Planning and Zoning staff and for action by the Planning and Zoning Commission.*

**A. IF YOU PLAN TO:**

- Build a new building
- Make interior renovations to an existing commercial building,
- Change the use of a commercial building (for example, office use to retail use or office to medical office),
- Make structural exterior changes to a commercial building,
- Change the facade of a commercial building,
- Install a canopy or permanent awning,
- Install a free-standing sign,
- Change the traffic pattern on a commercial property,
- Make changes to the parking lot,
- Or make other site changes on a commercial property,

You will need:

- An existing conditions survey of the property.
- A proposed site plan of the property.
- Building plans drawn to scale.

**B. THE PROCESS**

1. Meet with a Planning and Zoning staff member.
2. Obtain an outline of the approvals and documents that are required for a complete application.
3. If you need Site Plan Approval, file a completed application in the Planning and Zoning Office. This will be processed by the Planning and Zoning Staff. If you will only need a permit, you will be so advised by the Planning and Zoning Staff.

**C. REVIEWS AND APPROVALS THAT MAY BE REQUIRED:**

- If there are wetlands or a watercourse on the property, the Conservation staff will review the project and make recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Staff.
- Facade changes or free-standing signs require review by the Architectural Review Board (ARB). The ARB comments are advisory only. The final decision on a project is made by the Planning and Zoning Commission. The Architectural Review Board generally meets the second and fourth Tuesday of every month, at 7:30 p.m.

**C. CODE ENFORCEMENT MEETING**

1. A Code Enforcement Committee meeting may be required. These meetings:
  - a) Are held the second and fourth Tuesday at 9:00 A.M.
  - b) Are attended by staff members from several departments: Building, Engineering, Conservation, Health, Planning and Zoning and Fire and Police.

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2. The Committee members review your application with you and advise you of items needed in order to complete your applications.

## D. HEARING

1. The Planning and Zoning staff establishes the date for a hearing before the seven-member Planning and Zoning Commission. These hearings are usually held at 7:30 p.m. on the first and third Thursday of each month. The neighbors within 250 feet of your property are advised of the hearing.
2. Describe your project. The seven Commission members and members of the public may ask you questions or make comments about your project.
3. The Planning and Zoning Commission usually makes a decision on an application within two weeks of the hearing. A majority affirmative vote of the commission is required for an approval. You will be advised of the decision by registered mail.

## E. PERMITS

1. **Zoning Permit:** After Planning and Zoning Commission approval of the project, obtain a zoning permit from a Planning and Zoning staff member. *These are done by appointment only.* Other departmental approvals, such as Health, may be required prior to the issuance of the zoning permit.
2. **Building Permit:** After the zoning permit has been issued, obtain a building permit prior to beginning the construction. The Building Official will issue the building permit. These are issued by appointment only.

## III ZONING CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

**After the project is completed, a zoning certificate of compliance and a certificate of occupancy are required before the building can be occupied.**

A. To obtain these certificates complete the following:

1. Contact the Planning and Zoning office and request a final inspection of the project.
2. If your zoning permit required a **final as-built survey** of the project, you must submit three copies of final survey with your inspection request to the Planning and Zoning Office before the Zoning Certificate of Compliance can be issued.
3. Contact the Building Department and request a final inspection for a Certificate of Occupancy when the work has been completed.
4. The Zoning Inspector will contact the Health Department, Engineering and the Conservation Department (as required) to make sure the project is in compliance with regulations. When the project falls under the jurisdiction of these Departments independent inspections and certificates of compliance may be required by these agencies.

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5. After the Zoning Inspector conducts an inspection of the property and determines compliance with the Health, Conservation, Engineering and Zoning requirements; the Zoning Certificate of Compliance is issued and sent to the Building Department.
6. The Building Department issues the Certificate of Occupancy after the building has been inspected by a Building Official and the zoning certificate of compliance has been obtained. You can pick up the Certificate of Occupancy at the Building Department.

**IV. SIGNS**

*A sign is an illustration or display painted, attached or erected for identification or for advertising purposes.*

**All signs require zoning permits and building permits.**

The requirements for signs are different for each zoning district. Before designing a sign, please contact the Planning and Zoning office to determine the requirements for the district where your business is located.

You will need:

- A scaled drawing with dimensions of the sign.
- A plot plan of the property showing the building on the property.

The following steps are required:

- A zoning permit must be issued by a Planning and Zoning staff member in order to make certain the sign is in conformance with the zoning regulations.
- After you have the zoning permit you must then obtain a building permit from a Building Department Official before the sign can be erected.

Exceptions:

- "Sandwich" signs are prohibited in all areas of Westport.
- Neon signs are prohibited in all areas of Westport.
- Free-standing signs and wall signs over 50 square feet require a review by the Architectural Review Board before permits can be issued.
- Any name change for an existing free-standing sign in the setback area will require an appearance before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

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